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ABSTRACT

The Potsdam Advocate program is a program designed to aid students who feel they are victims of discrimination or sexual offenses. An analysis of this program and its literature is instructive to students and scholars in the field of organizational communication. Developed in 1991, this program provides a structure and options that students may follow should they become victims. In order to rhetorically analyze something there must be an artifact; in this case there are two, the old pamphlet for the Advocate Program and the new one. The newest pamphlet revises the first in several respects. For one, it is larger than the first; colors are more brilliant; and the title of the program is printed in larger, bold print. Upon opening the newest brochure a student will find an introductory page not in the first edition. In an organized fashion, this page outlines the main concepts of the program: (1) informal resolution; (2) bringing charges through the campus judicial system; and (3) bringing charges through the civil legal system. The changes to the brochure are largely beneficial; pictures of the faculty in the brochure is a particularly good idea because it allows a student to look through for a professor that he or she might know. There are several problems with the Advocate Program: namely, students do not know about it--this is confirmed by two informal surveys. Another problem is that students do not know what constitutes harassment. Still, the program addresses on the local level a very significant nation-wide problem. (TB)

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Potsdam College Advocate Program: An Alternative to Speech Regulations

Anna Gordon

In the late 1960's and early 1970's this nation was experiencing many changes. Some changes were welcomed, while others were cursed. Chuck Berry moved aside for the growing population of the Rolling Stones and Abba, people wore bell bottoms and platform shoes, the "flower child" was born, and many experiments with drugs occurred. The Vietnam war buried the sons, husbands, fathers, and brothers of our nation, while fighting, dying and mourning all prompted many things such as political and social unrest. This led to many demonstrations and movements and numerous historical events. Also during this time and perhaps even a result of these happenings, a student code of conduct was developed at Potsdam College in Potsdam, New York. A small town located in the north country of New York State, Potsdam College experienced the unrest that seemed to blanket the nation. Although no specific dramatic events occurred on campus to prompt its development, a need was felt and therefore a code of rights was born. Now, over twenty years later the code of rights still remains although some amendments to it have occurred. In addition to the code of rights The Advocate Program was produced. The program's main function is to aid students who are victims of discrimination and sexual offenses.

What exactly is The Advocate Program? What does it offer and who is associated with it? How was it started and why? Has the program proven successful? What are some of the problems of the Advocate Program? Do problems really exist in the Potsdam community for such a program to exist? Is the program common knowledge on campus? Is the system of the program easily accessible to students? Do students even know about this program? In what ways is the program advertised on campus? How is this program relevant to the student code of conduct? In looking at Potsdam College as an organization, what concepts from organizational

CS 508 89

communication can be applied to The Advocate program? In this essay I hope to address all of these questions in an attempt to rhetorically analyze the program. To do this I will refer to the various interviews which I conducted, as well as the research I have completed in an attempt to evaluate The Advocate Program.

What is The Advocate Program? The Potsdam College Advocate program is a program designed to aid students who feel they are victims of discrimination or sexual offenses. This program was developed in 1991. In an interview with Potsdam College President Merwin he revealed to me that The Advocate Program was actually an idea that was at the time already being used at the neighboring campus of St. Lawrence University. The president's wife is employed at that school and after various discussions about the program, President Merwin thought that it would be a good idea to incorporate such a program at Potsdam College. The Advocate Program was then developed out of the Affirmative Action Office that exists at Potsdam College.

The Advocate Program consists of 15 specially trained members of the faculty of Potsdam College who volunteer their time to help students who are victims of sexual offenses of discrimination. The coordinator of the program is Diana Budhai. Basically this program provides a structure and options that students may follow should they become victims. The brochure of this program states:

> The Advocate Program was developed to make the process of reporting and resolving harassment on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or disability easier to students. Such harassment is against the law, and students at Potsdam College will be provided every avenue to protect themselves from this behavior."

The Advocates explain the procedures and options to a student and if the student wishes, the Advocate will guide and remain at the student's side through the chosen process and until a resolution is reached. All of the work done by the Advocates for the students of Potsdam College is completely confidential.

How is this program advertised on campus? Is it common knowledge to students that this program exists? The brochure that advertises this program is distributed to all faculty and staff members of Potsdam. According to Diana Budhai the reason for this is so that these people are aware of the program and also so that they may make a referral, when confronted by a student in need, to the Advocate Program. Also these pamphlets were distributed to many of the clubs, organizations, and groups around campus. In addition to these methods the pamphlet for this program has been posted in many locations on campus where students tend to linger or hang out and socialize.

In order to rhetorically analyze something there must be an artifact. I have chosen the two pamphlets that have existed since the programs beginning, as a rhetorical artifact. To evaluate the two pamphlets it is most logical to simply look at the layout of the brochures, to note changes that have occurred in the brochures and lastly to evaluate these changes.

The first program consists of a green and off white pamphlet that has the title, The Advocate Program hidden in a strange circular design on the front. A quote from the revised Student Judicial Code of November, 1991 is locate don the front and states:

> "Advocates are an initial contact for students who feel they
> have been victims of a sexual offense or any discrimination.
> Advocates will guide students to-and if necessary
> through-their options, including the campus judicial system.
> An advocate may serve as advisor to the victim when involved
> in the actual proceedings of the judicial system."

Upon opening the program a student will find small pictures of the faculty members that are involved in this program. Along side to each photograph is the member's name, the department in which they are employed and their office and phone number. Below this information is a small paragraph that explains where the person received his or her education and identifies some other groups that the person may belong to as well as some of their personal interests. Underneath this paragraph is a small description of why the person is involved in The Advocate Program and sometimes what he or she wishes to accomplish in his or her involvement. An example of this is a statement made by Emilio Mendoza of the music department which states:

> I want to be an Advocate to serve as a contradiction to the common belief that Latinos are synonymous with macho male chauvinism. This is an opportunity for me to show that contradiction."

The newest brochure of The Advocate Program has undergone numerous changes. To begin with, the pamphlet is larger than the first. The colors on the cover have been changed to maroon, gray, and white. The title of the program is printed in larger, bold print, and is no longer hidden in a circular design. Instead the words Potsdam College are printed above the title. A quote below the title states:

> The ADVOCATE concept is the result of a campus-wise concern for greater racial and gender sensitivity. The program has enjoyed widespread support; those involved believe that it will become more and more useful as students become aware of this option.

Also along the bottom of the brochure a phone number and the name of Diana Budhai is given for more information. The paper of the pamphlet has even changed. The newest brochure is printed on glossy paper.

Upon opening the newest brochure a student will find an introductory page that was not present in the first edition of the brochure. This page outlines in an organized fashion the main concepts of The Advocate Program. There is a picture of the coordinator of the program on this page. Also the options of the program are listed. They are: 1) an informal resolution, 2) bringing charges through the campus judicial system, and 3) bringing charges through the civil legal system. This page explains to the reader that not only will the Advocate offer a student options for their case but the Advocate will also assist by making referrals to: the counseling center, health services, the office of diversity, and the office of student development. The brochure continues in the same fashion as the previous one in the way that it features a photograph of the faculty members involved, a quotation from the member, their office and phone number, and a paragraph of information about them. The only difference in this is that the member's name is in red, bold print, making it almost a headline or an additional method of organization.

Before I attempt to analyze the changes in the brochures I want to refer to an interview that I had with Diana Budhai. I decided to ask her why the original pamphlet had been changed. I also wanted to know who had asked for the changes to occur. She explained to me that she had wanted the brochure changed in an attempt to attract more attention tot eh program.

She feels very strongly about the program but also feels that it does not have the publicity that it should. The reasoning behind her request for the changes was to gain increased knowledge of the program from the public. She said that to begin with she wanted a new pamphlet that was more organized. The introductory page helps to outline the program a little more. Also the change in the colors used in the pamphlet is to show that this program is truly supported by the organization known as Potsdam College. Basically the glossy paper and the larger lettering of the title and of the words Potsdam College are to show students that this really is a professional program that will take their problems seriously.

I believe that the changes that took place in the pamphlet really are beneficial. The change in size, paper, color, and design all help to make the brochure more attractive, interesting, and informative. Also I believe that the pictures of the faculty that are involved is an excellent idea. This allows a troubled student look through the pamphlet and maybe recognize a member with whom he or she will feel confident with. I also believe that this program is very informative which makes The Advocate Program very accessible for a student. If students are aware of this pamphlet then they can easily get in touch with any of the 15 members involved to discuss their situation.

What are the problems with this program? The first problem I believe is that the student population really is not aware of The Advocate Program. I am basing this statement on two separate surveys that I took concerning The Advocate Program. The first one I conducted on my organizational communication class. In a written survey they were asked to name a place, or person, or organization that they could contact if they felt they were victims of discrimination of any kind of sexual offenses. Out of 32 students not one named The Advocate Program. The second survey was administered to a group of ten girls. When asked if they had ever heard of

The Advocate Program all said no except for two, neither of whom could identify what it was. When I presented them with the actual brochure, the majority of them said that they had, at some point, noticed it around campus but never knew what it was. I strongly believe that the majority of the students are no different from either group of students that was surveyed and that the program's main problem is that it is not common knowledge to students on campus.

Another problem which I encountered is that students are not sure what constitutes sexual harassment, and discrimination. Some students may not even be aware of their rights. Again this adds to reason that the program is not common knowledge. Also I believe that another form of advertising the program may help to increase the awareness of the student s attending Potsdam College.

Do problems really exist in the Potsdam community and on Potsdam College campus for there to be a need for a program like The Advocate program? I believe that there definitely is. In an interview with president Merwin he explained to me a situation which occurred at the hospital. A black person walked in and sat in the lobby waiting for someone when he was approached by someone who said to him, "we don't like niggers here." I believe that this is proof that there is a problem in the community. Also in speaking with Diana Budhai, she seems to think that because Potsdam is not a very diverse campus that those minority students or people from other cultures feel an extra pressure. She deals with these people daily. She also believes that some people on the campus do not realize the extent of the problems that exist and also that many people are not willing to admit the problems that exist.

Is this program successful? Diana Budhai says yes. In her experience in The Advocate Program she has never had to go through the court system with a student because all of the cases that she has personally dealt with have been settled out of court. I am unable to agree that this is proof of a success rate. I believe that the fact that there is a problem in Potsdam and that so few people are aware of The Advocate Program tells a different story.

We really can look at The Advocate Program as part of a solution to a nationwide problem. In Potsdam which is not really a very diverse place maybe the program does indeed aid. But looking at the huge nationwide problem, The Advocate Program is like putting a Band-Aid on the casualties of a bomb. It simply may not be enough. Perhaps further education of the problem will help, or perhaps that too will not be enough.

What does The Advocate Program have to do with the Student Code of Conduct? Perhaps in a way it is a way to show that if the code does not prevent the problems of discrimination and harassment than Potsdam College has adopted a method to deal with those situations, The Advocate Program.

If we try to apply some concepts from the study of Organizational Communication perhaps it will aid this situation. Potsdam College is an organization. Organizations have culture, but not in the sense that they have computers, fax machines or material things. The culture of an organization is something that develops over time and that adapts to its new members, functions, problems, and purposes. Part of the culture of Potsdam College can be the student code of conduct. This has changes and been revised to deal with not only changing members of the organization but in order to stay constant with the rights which individuals of the United States are given under the First Amendment of the Constitution.

"In organizations culture is said to be communicative creations. They emerge and are sustained by the communicative acts of all members."

(Conrad, 17)

Perhaps The Advocate Program is designed to handle those students and situations that are not a part of the desired culture of Potsdam College, but being a part of a nation wide problem are bound to occur. If this is the case then I am able to agree that the program is a good idea. Although I also believe it must rise above some of the problems that it has in trying to become a common knowledge to Students of the organization of Potsdam College.

The Advocate Program of Potsdam College is designed to aid the student who of the college who feel they are victims of discrimination or sexual offense. This will not be a beneficial source if students are not aware of its existence. Also another problem may be that students really are not aware of what constitutes discrimination and sexual offenses. This too must be dealt with. As Potsdam College struggles to increase the diversity of the student population it must also look ahead to the problems that may occur. Making a small town like Potsdam a diverse cultural community will not be easily accepted by some. In this context I believe that The Advocate Program is essential to the survival of a new diverse college community. But I also firmly believe that the small problems that plague The Advocate Program must be dealt with further, prior to moving ahead.

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